

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Avalanche Advisory

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Good Morning, KD with the avalanche advisory, valid for today, January 15th, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, January 15th. The Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center held a Forecasters Field Day yesterday which was greatly attended by fellow avalanche hunters and we would like to thank all those involved in making it a big success and advancing our cooperation and opportunities for education. Special thanks to Schweitzer Mountain for hosting the event, Selkirk Powder Company for the plush accommodations (and the snocat service), and thanks again to everyone who made the time to add your valuable input.

WEATHER

Hold on to your tuks, and you might throw a pair of waders in too, because we are about to experience some of North Idaho's famous winter weather. A quick synopsis of the week's weather leading up to today reveals that due to a warming trend the snowpack has settled and also a slight crust layer formed and became buried by new snow. Snotel sites in our forecast region show we picked up moderate amounts of new snow in the last 24 hours, about 1 inch in most areas but 4 inches to the north at Hidden Lake. Snow pits revealed about 4-6 inches of new snow in the last 48 hours. The National Weather Service is calling for an extended period of precipitation as a moist frontal system moves directly across the northern portion of our forecast region. For today a 50% chance of snow is predicted to the north and less than ½ inch to the south, winds will be moderate out of the SW and temperatures in the mid 30s. Tonight ole man winter gets nasty with a very good chance of 3-7 inches of new snow to the north and 1-3 inches to the south, continued strong SW winds, and temperatures around 30 degrees at 5,000 feet. The outlook for Saturday shows a better than average chance of more snow, moderate winds out of the S to SW, and temperatures in the low to mid 30s. The NAM weather model shows heavy precipitation Saturday evening but overall it seems the strong, moist system will begin to pass with the temperatures cooling, winds calming, and the chance of snow diminishing by Sunday. **You can expect the avalanche hazard to increase for the outlook period.**

Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are probable. Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are possible.

Snowpack

We had about 25 people digging pits in the snow yesterday on Big Blue north of Schweitzer. On a SW, SE, and an E aspect we all found similar conditions. The new snow about 4-6 inches deep was residing on a slight crust and lighter snow at the base was sliding easily on the crust or just below it. The sliding surface was a 1 finger hardness layer that produced a clean shear. The surface hoar layers in the midpack have gained some strength but they're not gone. The old surface hoar layer over the faceted snow near the bottom is still showing signs of weakness in shear tests as well. Our main concern today is new snow loading the 4-6 inch deep weak layer which has not formed a good bond to the crust or the firmer layer below it.

Terrain

Wind will be a factor for the next 24-36 hours so watch how the surface snow is becoming a firm slab on exposed aspects and how it is loading on lee aspects. Weak interfaces could be forming in the new snow as well. Don't discount the buried layers of surface hoar even though the snowpack has settled, they're still there and could fail in steep unanchored terrain.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as MODERATE on slopes steeper than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**. Pockets of **Considerable** avalanche danger could exist where exposed surface snow has been formed into a denser slab by the wind.

Snowpack

On Lookout Pass, in about 5 feet of snow at 5,800 feet Carole found a snowpack that was loose and faceted on a south aspect. At about 2 feet deep she found the weakest layer to be the persistent surface hoar that was shearing cleanly but with moderate force applied. Above this layer on a crust she was getting easy shears. Windloading was evident in the St. Regis Basin.

Terrain

The windloaded areas should be your main concern today, especially where the surface snow has formed a denser slab. The surface hoar seems to be still weak enough that is it failing with clean shears and this should be telling you that you could initiate an avalanche on this weak layer. To the south it seems that rain is a possibility so be aware of warming conditions and rain rapidly weakening the snowpack.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Joe Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on north and wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE on all other slopes above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are unlikely, *human triggered* avalanches are **possible**.

Snowpack

In Fishhook Creek at 5,400 feet Ed found the primary weak layer to be the New Year's surface hoar layer buried about 1.5 feet deep. All shear tests were producing easy to moderate results and propagation tests (ECT) were producing failure across the whole block. This is telling us this layer has not strengthened much with the settlement of the pack and large avalanches at this layer are still possible.

Terrain

His main concerns for today are for the northerly aspects where surface hoar has persisted more intact. New snow today and tomorrow will stress this weak layer further before it begins to stabilize. To the south it seems that rain is a possibility so be aware of warming conditions and rain rapidly weakening the snowpack.

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, January 22nd, 2010.

If you're at Schweitzer Mountain this week and have your avalanche gear take advantage of the free avalanche beacon training at 10AM on Sunday at the Clock Tower. Schweitzer Patrol will help you hone your skills with a 1 hour free training. After that, hit the beacon park at the top of the Great Escape Quad, compliments of the Selkirk Powder Company. For a great resource for avalanche education and weather observations check out <http://www.selkirkpowderco.com/>.

The State of Idaho Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the IPNF-AC, is conducting (**Free**) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers this winter. The next class will be offered in Grangeville on January 22-23rd. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov, or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

The Panhandle Avalanche Center in Sandpoint and Sandpoint Parks and Recreation is sponsoring free avalanche workshops for all snowgoers. "Decision Making in the Backcountry" workshops will be offered and 2/10/10. Oly had a great class on Wednesday. These are offered at the old Federal Building in Sandpoint and are **Free to the public**. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 783-2130. In Avery contact Ed Odegard at 245-6209.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.